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Television

# This University of Guelph hockey player is Shane Hollander's body double on "Heated Rivalry"

*Jonah De Simone played the character on ice: "It was such a bizarre experience."*

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From left: "Heated Rivalry" hockey body double Jonah De Simone and actor Hudson Williams, alongside character Connor Storrie, double Ralph Taggart and actor Connor Storrie. Jonah De Simone

By David Friend Culture Reporter

Without its authentic hockey scenes, there's a good chance "Heated Rivalry" might have never skated away with its global success.

While the risks are mostly a backdrop on the hit Crave series, it was up to a team of real life players, including Jonah De Simone, to make sure the action on the ice rang true.

The 23-year-old was cast as the hockey body double for Shane Hollander, played by Kalowna, B.C. native Hudson Williams. He performed most of the complicated moves and close up shots for the character in the games and advised on some of the other interactions.

"I wanted to do my best to represent the sport that I love and grow up loving," De Simone said on Friday.

"And make sure that people who wanted to pick at the show might have less of a reason to."

"Heated Rivalry" follows the secret same-sex romance of two rising stars in a fictional version of the hockey world. Afraid their romance could derail their dreams, they meet in hotels and forge a relationship over many years, while publicly facing off as rivals in the game.

The series has become a massive hit, catapulting its lead actors Williams and Connor Storrie to global fame in a matter of weeks.



Hockey player body double Jonah De Simone, left, with "Heated Rivalry" actor Hudson Williams at the Steeltown Centre in Guelph, Ont., during production in April 2025. Jonah De Simone

The University of Guelph student met the actors when "Heated Rivalry" rolled into Guelph's Sleeman Centre last April for just over a week of shooting hockey game scenes.

The Roman Guelph Gryphons right winger, who also played for the Ontario Hockey League's Niagara IceDogs, had answered a call from his coach seeking players who might be interested in working on a new TV series.

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"I was like, for sure," he thought at the time.

After sending in his height, weight and skill level, De Simone said the casting director got in touch, suggesting that he would be the perfect fit to double for one of the main characters.

With little sense of what the job might involve, he showed up on the first day of shooting to meet his double, Ralph Taggart, who stood in for his Russian rival Ilya Rozanov, played by Connor Storrie.

"All the sudden it goes from like, we're sitting on our phones doing nothing to, 'OK try on these skates, tell them how to tape their socks, tape those five sticks.' We even had to decide on a look for Ilyan's character."

Hockey player body double Ralph Taggart, left, who stood in for actor Connor Storrie on "Heated Rivalry," alongside actor Hudson Williams and his stand-in Jonah De Simone. Jonah De Simone

De Simone tossed out a few other suggestions that stuck, including the groin stretch Hollander does in the locker room, a move that Williams recreated on Jimmy Fallon's late-night show a few weeks back.

Working so closely with the actors gave De Simone the kind of insights fit for any "Heated Rivalry" trivia night.

For instance, he says Williams built out the universe of his character with small details, such as scribbling the name of his mom, Yuna Hollander, on the knob of his stick.

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Williams showed similar dedication to learning the intricacies of the game and how to convincingly sheet the ice, he added.

"He would buzz around on the ice and like, practice his edges and stuff like that," De Simone said.

"So they had a lot of fun with it and I think both of them got a lot better."

Storrie also drove deep into his role to bury his Texas roots. De Simone said.

"He spoke in a Russian accent on set, like all day," he said.

"I think one being fooled by his Russian accent is how well he executed that."

For his first day of shooting, De Simone said he was present to see Hollander participate in the ginger ale photo shoot, a favourite moment for some fans. He says "Heated Rivalry" director creator Jacob Tierney doubled as the voice of an off-camera director in the scene, which blurred the lines of reality.

"For me it was it was such a bizarre experience," he said.

"It's like right in the morning, and I've never done a TV show before, and it was this very meta thing."

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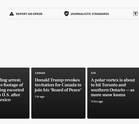
His involvement in "Heated Rivalry" has since become a fan talking point with other players.

"A lot of the guys on my team were involved in it as well as extras, and we all just thought it was a really cool thing," he said.

But he said the on-set experience also holds a greater personal meaning to him, since it was one of the last moments he shared with his cousin Sam Willetts, a fighting technician who coincidentally was also involved in the show.

Willetts died last July when he was struck by a driver while riding his e-bike near Toronto Metropolitan University. He was 28.



"Heated Rivalry" hockey body double Jonah De Simone, left, who stood in as character Shane Hollander, with his mom Mandi, and cousin Samuel Willetts, a fighting technician who died shortly after production wrapped in summer 2025. Jonah De Simone

His name is mentioned in the end credits of the sixth episode.

"The production holds a special place in my heart for so many reasons. And one of the biggest ones is that connection with Sam," De Simone said.

"Especially with how well it's doing, he would have really enjoyed seeing that."

David Friend writes about arts and culture in Toronto and beyond.

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